

Distinguished Committee Members,

Montana has a "one of a kind" information delivery system that other states continue to try to copy. NRIS (Natural Resources Information System) delivers to its recipients up-to-date information that can be used by almost all offsite computer users. For some it is a way of getting good information about the state of Montana. For some, it is a way to explore the infrastructure of the state and find out what Montana has to offer in way of a great place to live and work. Still, for others, it allows them to search for very specific information about; roads, towns, public lands, districts, topography, land use, water, population, infrastructure – the list grows yearly.

For Stillwater County, NRIS is not only a great source of information for us, it is critical for our safety and protection of our population. You are probably aware of the Saunders fire and certainly the Derby fire that blackened 208,500 acres of South-Central Montana this summer. During those dark days of August and September, the one bright spot was the no lives were lost. During that massive fire explosion, fanned by 60 to 70 mph winds, on August 30<sup>th</sup>, the fire covered 121,000 acres in 24 hours and totally destroyed 32 homes and another 44 outbuildings. The entire southern part of Stillwater County was evacuated including 850 homes, thousands of head of cattle, sheep and horses, and two entire towns. Those evacuations would not have been completed in the manner in which they were if it were not for the information gathered from the NRIS State Library site for 4 counties; Carbon, Sweet Grass, Yellowstone, and Carbon.

As a GIS Specialist for Stillwater County, I was able to gather all the needed information from NRIS that aided in the efficient and successful evacuation efforts. The communities came together to get through a very difficult situation using the GIS mapping and information. This is not the only time that NRIS has been used in Montana for these same reasons. It has become a very critical part of planning, evaluating and securing the safety of all Montanans.

Gathering information and displaying it in a format that everyone can use cannot be accomplished except by a very well organized state effort. Information is very expensive, it costs a lot in time and money – *but saving lives is priceless*. I cannot emphasize enough how much we need the state library and the NRIS program. As we plan for disasters in the future, NRIS will continue to need to improve its ability to gather and deliver information for the state of Montana. Its mission is an integral part of the economic development and safety of the citizens of this state.

I strongly encourage to your continued support of the Natural Resource Information System and the State Library. Their services are a critical part of a large information network for the state of Montana. Without this central gathering and distribution system, Montana cannot keep up with the exploding demand for up-to-date and accurate information.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

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